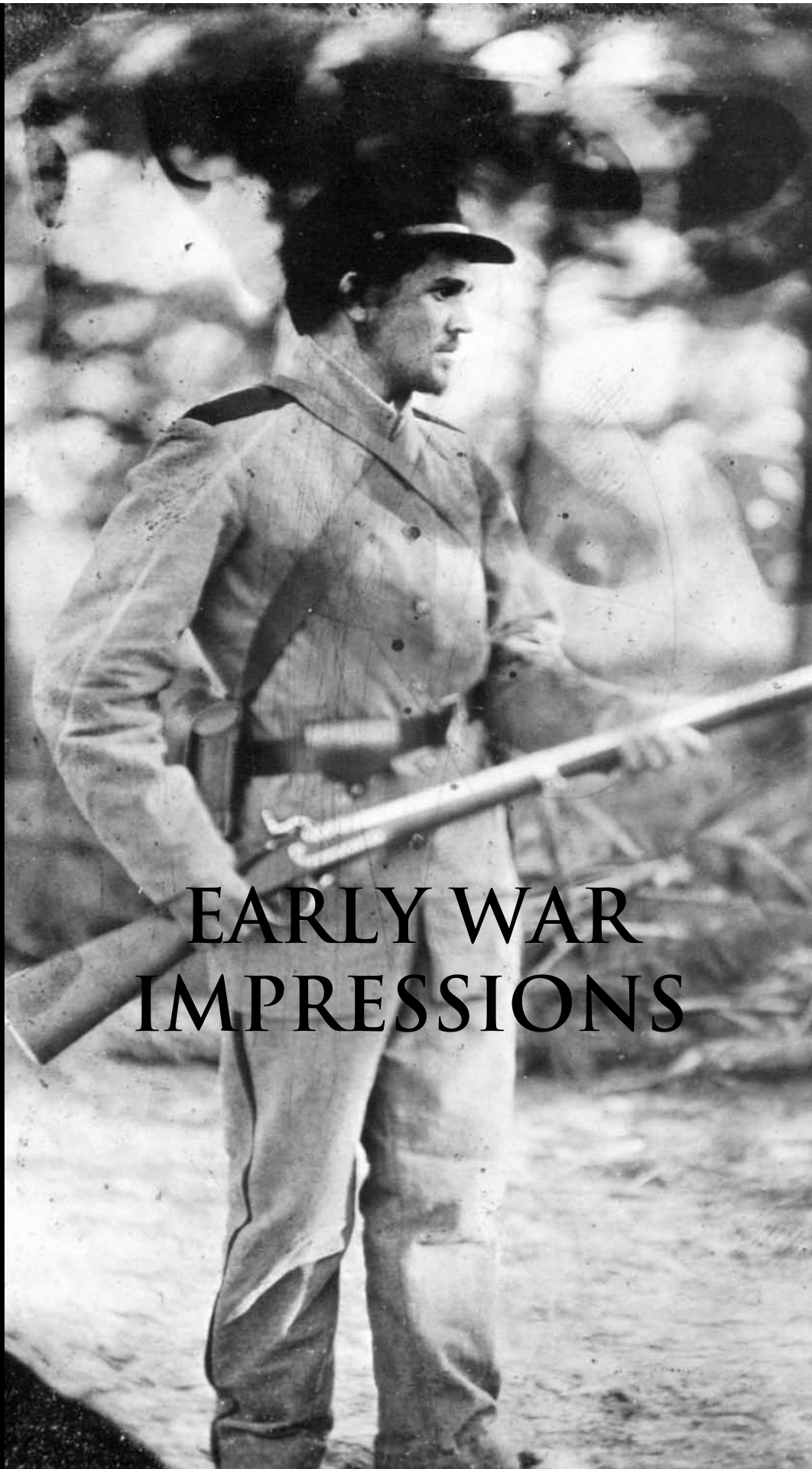


TWENTY-SIXTH  
NORTH CAROLINA



EARLY WAR  
IMPRESSIONS

26<sup>TH</sup>  
NORTH CAROLINA  
REGIMENT

EARLY-WAR TIME FRAME  
1861-1862

As war erupted in 1861 North Carolina, like most of the South, found itself lacking in everything required to make war. Everything, that is, but enthusiasm. North Carolina did have existing militia companies scattered across the state who quickly answered the call in those first days of the conflict. These militia companies brought with them weapons, accoutrements, equipment and uniforms that were as varied as individual taste and pocketbooks would allow. Despite these organized and uniformed pre-war militias, thousands of volunteers needing full sets of uniforms and equipment were enlisting each day. As a result, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a set of uniform regulations in late May of 1861 that clearly defined the uniform dress of North Carolina Troops:

UNIFORM

COAT.

10. For Enlisted Man.—The uniform coat for all enlisted men shall be a sack coat of gray cloth (of North Carolina manufacture) extending half way down the thigh, and made loose, with falling collar, and an inside pocket on each breast, six coat buttons down the front, commencing at the throat; a strip of cloth sewed on each shoulder, extending from the base of the collar to the shoulder seam, an inch and a half wide at the base of the collar, and two inches wide at the shoulder; this strip will be of black cloth for Infantry, red for Artillery and yellow for Cavalry.

11. For a Musician.—The same as for other enlisted men, with the addition of a bar of braid, horizontal to each button—black for Infantry—red for Artillery and yellow for Cavalry.

BUTTONS.

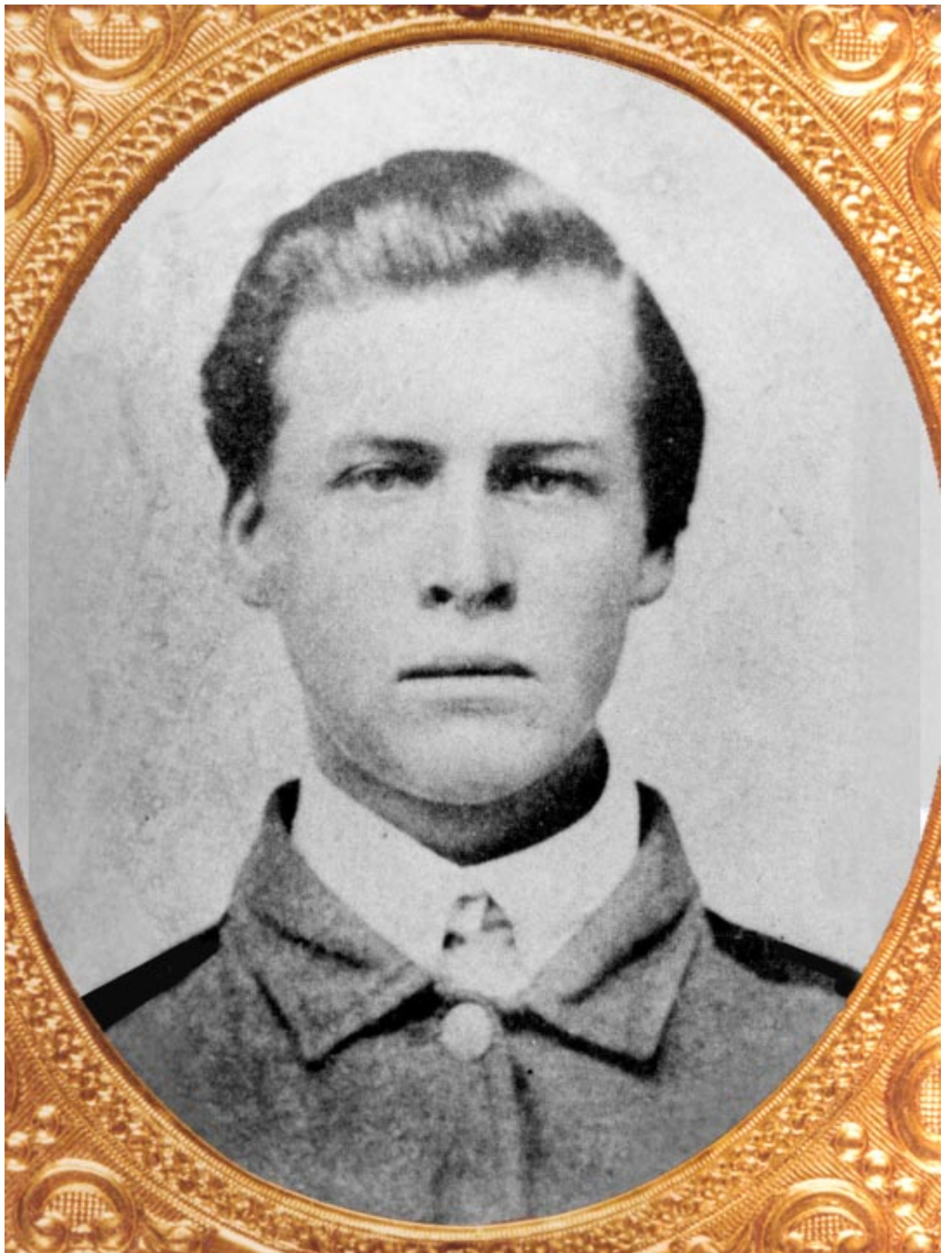
12. North Carolina Gilt Buttons.

TROWSERS.

15. For Enlisted Men.—The uniform trowsers for enlisted men will be of North Carolina gray cloth, made loose, reinforced for mounted men, with a stripe of cloth down and over the outer seams. The stripe will be black for Infantry, red for Artillery and yellow for Cavalry—one inch wide for non-commissioned staff of regiments and sergeants—three-fourths of an inch wide for corporals and one half inch wide for privates.

HAT.

21. For Enlisted Men.—A gray hat of the same pattern as for officers, looped in like manner, with the letter of the Company and number of Regiment of brass in front. The hat band being red for Artillery, yellow for Cavalry





and black for Infantry.

22. Officers, when off duty or on fatigue duty may wear the French forage cap, according to pattern in Quarter Master General's office.

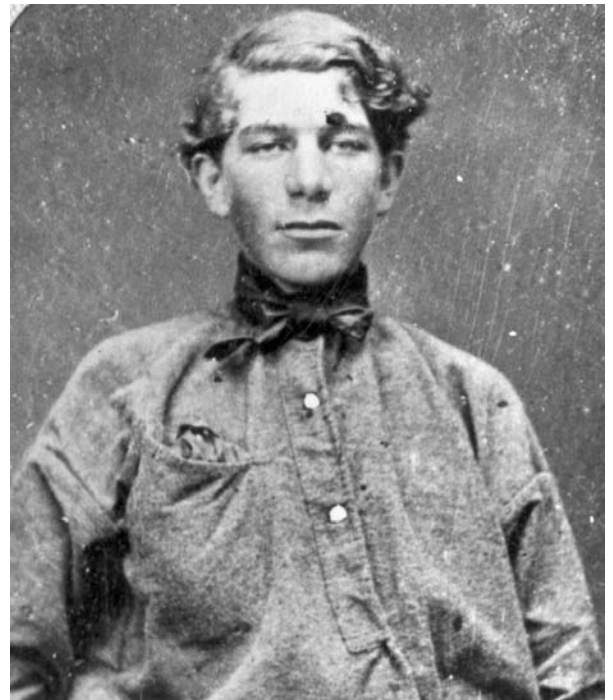
23. Enlisted Men.—Gray, according to pattern.

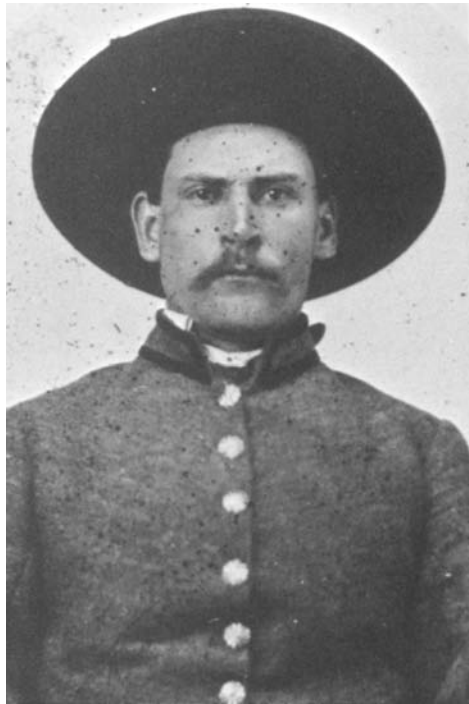
While many of North Carolina's early volunteers received the 1861 regulation uniform many more flocked to the army in uniforms made by their home communities. These homemade uniforms, much like the uniforms adopted by pre-war militia units, varied with the ability, style and finances of their producers. One of the most prevalent early war uniforms was a simple overshirt often referred to as a battleshirt. The prevalence of battleshirts early in the war was due to two main factors:

1. They were quick and easy to produce
2. They were inexpensive.

This meant that with limited funds, people, and with readily available materials, communities could quickly outfit their sons and fathers for war. Battleshirts came in a variety of styles but the most common were a simple pull over style overshirt usually made of wool flannel or jeans cloth. They were usually trimmed with wool tape (for a more

martial appearance) and plain glass, bone or brass civilian buttons. Battleshirts were often worn out over the trouser in the fashion of a smock but just as frequently they were worn tucked into the trousers. In this fashion suspenders would not have been worn, instead the trousers would have been kept up with a belt. This was actually a common practice since suspenders were not an issue item. Chevrons would





not have been worn on any battleshirts.

Despite their frequency, battleshirts were actually one part of a larger uniform supply system known as the commutation system. The commutation system actually had a long standing tradition with the 19th century American military. The ingrained practice of keeping a small standing army meant that the Government, during times of war, increased the size of the army through volunteers, and consequently, relied on the volunteers to cloth and equip themselves due to the small stock of clothing and equipment the Government kept on hand for the regular army. Under this system, volunteers purchased their own uniforms and were reimbursed by the Government against established rates per item. There remains some confusion among many living historians about "commutation" jackets. There was no specific style of jacket known as a "commutation" jacket. Instead, commutation jackets were any jacket, regardless of style, procured through the commutation system. These jackets typically followed military fashion of the day and shell jackets were a popular item of military clothing all the way back to the short roundabout jackets of the American Revolution and the war of 1812. In addition, shell jackets had the added advantage of requiring less material, time and money than frock coats. Therefore, due to the popularity of style, and economics, commutation jackets were typically short shell jackets trimmed with wool tape in a military fashion on the collar epaulettes and cuffs. These are not to be confused with Richmond Depot Type I jackets even though both are of a similar style. The RD I jackets were manufactured and issued by the Confederate Central Government and were not purchased by soldiers for reimbursement.

The issues of uniforms and equipment early in the war is indicative of the perceived notion that the war was going to be a short affair. Once it was realized that the conflict was going to be a protracted one the deficiencies of the commutaiton system became apparent. Soldiers could not easily procure new uniforms while on active campaign, and the North Carolina Government, nor the government in Richmond, had a sufficiently organized and operational quartermaster system capable of meeting the needs of thousands of soldier in the field. This ultimately lead to the chronic raggedness and lack of uniformity of the Confederate soldier throughout 1862 and into 1863. In mid 1862 North Carolina stopped production of the 1861 regulation uniform and began producing a short untrimmed shell jacket which remained in production throughout the war for issue to North Carolina Troops. By 1863, the North Carolina Government had developed a very functional quartermaster system. Ultimately, the North Carolina Government did very well by its soldier as the North Carolina soldier was the best clothed, equipped and most uniform soldier in the Confederate States Army.

# 1861-1862



# NORTH CAROLINA TROOPS, ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

BATTLESHIRT



COMMUTATION JACKET

